



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 10**

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OFFICE OF
ECOSYSTEMS, TRIBAL AND
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

June 18, 2012

Ms. Cindy Callahan
Federal Highway Administration
530 Center Street NE, Suite 420
Salem, Oregon 97301

Mr. Rod Thompson
Senior Environmental Project Manager
Oregon Department of Transportation
455 Airport Road SE, Bldg. B
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Salem River Crossing Project, Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft
Section 4(f) Evaluation (EPA Region 10 Project Number: 12-0017-FHW).

Dear Ms. Callahan and Mr. Thompson:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed the Salem River Crossing Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement. We are submitting comments in accordance with our responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

To accommodate forecasted traffic congestion in the project area, FHWA, ODOT and City of Salem propose to build a widened or new east-west crossing of the Willamette River in Salem. Eight Build alternatives are analyzed, which are located at one of three bridge crossing locations: at the existing bridges (Alternatives 2A and 2B); at Hope Avenue to Tryon Avenue (Alternative 3); and at Hope Avenue to Pine and Hickory Streets (Alternatives 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E). No preferred alternative is identified. The proposed project would result in substantial residential and business displacements and could potentially affect park/recreation and historic properties. The project proponents have engaged resource agencies through the Oregon Collaborative Environmental and Transportation Agreement on Streamlining (CETAS) process during project development to incorporate environmental information and obtain concurrence on the range of alternatives. FHWA and ODOT state that they have designed the Build Alternatives to avoid and minimize impacts to habitat, floodplains, and wetlands to the extent possible.

Overall, the Draft EIS does a good job of presenting a range of alternatives and analyzing their advantages, disadvantages, and impacts. We appreciate the comparison tables, such as, Tables 3.1-35 and 3.21-1, which help to illustrate the similarities and differences among alternatives. We are assigning the Draft EIS a rating of EC-2, Environmental Concerns - Insufficient Information. An explanation of this rating is enclosed. Our specific concerns, information needs, and recommendations are provided below:

Natural Systems, Communities, and Water Resources

We appreciate the initiative that FHWA and ODOT have shown in incorporating the Oregon Conservation Strategy to identify strategic habitat areas within the project area, and evaluating how the project will affect some of the key conservation goals and issues. This approach seems to provide a more holistic assessment of local and regionally significant ecosystems and their conservation needs. We also appreciate the evaluations regarding invasive species.

However, more clarification is needed to support the determination that there would be greater net benefits to several resources, such as, water quality, wetland habitats, and invasive species, with the Build Alternatives as compared to the No Action Alternative. Many of the practices proposed (use of Best Management Practices, stormwater treatment, etc.) are helpful and likely to be effective in the short-term, but the specifics of how those net benefits would be achieved in the long-term are not provided. It is also unclear whether or not any of the water quality improvement measures described in the Draft EIS would be applied to the existing bridges and roadways if one of the new bridge options is chosen as the preferred alternative.

Recommendations: In the Final EIS, clarify the types and locations of stormwater treatment that would be associated with the various alternatives. Include additional information regarding ODOT's Noxious Weed Control Program and how it would achieve long-term maintenance and control of invasive species.

The Draft EIS acknowledges there will be an increased amount of impervious surfaces that will result from the Build Alternatives and the related implications for reduced groundwater recharge and low summer instream flows. However the Draft EIS does not discuss the potential use of Low Impact Development techniques either within or outside the project footprint to mitigate or offset the new impervious surfaces.

Recommendation: Visit the Green Highways website at <http://www.greenhighwayspartnership.org/> for ways to potentially increase permeability in the project area. Consider "de-paving" areas to offset new pavement within affected watersheds.

Transportation Demand Management

Based on the transportation analysis, no one alternative appears to provide the long-term congestion relief that one might expect from such an infrastructure investment. While there are more hours of travel delay associated with the No Action Alternative, it seems to perform better than the Build Alternatives with respect to congestion at several key intersections. Energy use, criteria pollutants, and greenhouse gas emissions, are all lower with Alternative 4B, which would both widen the existing bridges and construct a new bridge. This alternative would seem to maximize the incentive to drive, which, along with construction impacts could increase energy use and emissions, so it is unclear how the conclusions about these environmental results were reached.

We appreciate that the traffic analysis (p. 2-106) assumes an aggressive expansion of transit and alternative modes (the analysis assumes that there will be an 8% reduction in peak-hour traffic, representing a 3 to 4-fold increase in transit and non-motorized use). This is to ensure that the need for highway capacity is not overstated and to illustrate the ability of alternative travel modes to extend the

capacity-bearing life of the proposed facility. The SKATS MPO RTSP travel demand model projection of only a 1 to 2% peak-hour increase in alternative travel modes are also applied in the discipline report analyses to represent a “worst case” scenario. We note that the use of pricing strategies has been considered as a means to reduce peak-period traffic congestion on the existing bridges (p. 1-10) and that the 2031 Regional Transportation System Plan recommends considering tolls for the new bridge (p. 1-11, 2-107). Whether used as a pricing strategy or as a means to finance the new bridge, tolls would serve as an effective means to extend facility capacity-related life as well as to increase use of alternative travel modes. We recommend that serious consideration be given to applying this effective transportation demand management strategy.

Recommendations:

- In the Final EIS, explain how the 8% less peak-hour traffic will be achieved.
- Work with the local transit agency to better align trip travel times for origin-destination pairs across the River with the time it takes for an automobile to make the trip. For example, the existing 47 minute trip involving a bus transfer as compared to a 7 minute trip via automobile creates a strong incentive to drive in order to save time (p. 3-14).
- Provide more information and analysis in the Final EIS regarding the potential benefits, feasibility, and likelihood of applying tolls as an effective transportation demand management and/or project financing strategy. Consider conducting a study that would illustrate the potential for using tolls to reduce travel demand and thereby minimize capacity expansions and long-term environmental impacts.

Air Quality During Construction

The DEIS states (p. 3-450) that contractors will comply with ODOT standard specifications in Section 290. It would be helpful to disclose in the NEPA document what air pollution control measures are included in this Section. Listed examples include vehicle equipment idling restrictions, burn restrictions, dust control measures, and permitting. We would like to see an expansion of Section 290 to include a full suite of measures to minimize overall construction emissions and exposure for nearby residents and businesses as well as construction workers.

Recommendations:

- See the Clean Construction USA website at <http://www.epa.gov/otaq/diesel/construction/> for examples of construction mitigation measures that may not be included in Section 290.
- Consider additional mitigation measures, including a measure to address preventative maintenance of construction equipment, use of newer construction vehicles and equipment, and/or engine retrofits to further strengthen the standard specifications.
- For dust control, in order to avoid introducing additional toxic pollutants to soil, groundwater, surface water, and air, use water rather than chemicals or oil (p. 3-450).

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comment on the Salem River Crossing Draft EIS. If you have questions or would like to discuss these comments please contact me at (206) 553-1601 or by email at reichgott.christine@epa.gov, or you may contact Elaine Somers of my staff at (206) 553-2966 somers.elaine@epa.gov, Yvonne Vallette in our Oregon Operations Office at (503) 326-2716 or by email at vallette.yvonne@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christine B. Reichgott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Christine" and last name "Reichgott" being the most prominent parts.

Christine B. Reichgott, Manager
Environmental Review and Sediment Management Unit

Enclosure

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Rating System for
Draft Environmental Impact Statements
Definitions and Follow-Up Action***

Environmental Impact of the Action

LO – Lack of Objections

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

EC – Environmental Concerns

EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce these impacts.

EO – Environmental Objections

EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no-action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

EU – Environmentally Unsatisfactory

EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potential unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

Adequacy of the Impact Statement

Category 1 – Adequate

EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis of data collection is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

Category 2 – Insufficient Information

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for EPA to fully assess environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

Category 3 – Inadequate

EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which should be analyzed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. EPA believes that the identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the National Environmental Policy Act and or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

* From EPA Manual 1640 Policy and Procedures for the Review of Federal Actions Impacting the Environment. February, 1987.